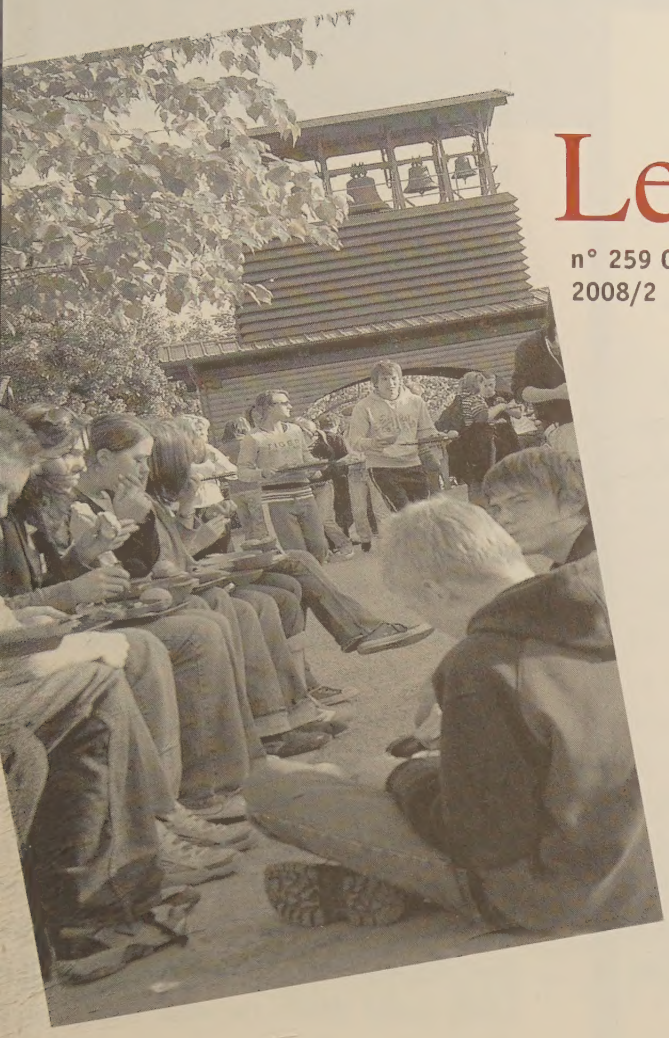

Letter from Taizé

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Widening Our Friendship to Include All

In 2008, the *Letter from Taizé* is continuing the reflection begun at Cochabamba.

In this issue, the outer pages attempt to show how the four questions at the end of the Letter 2008 find an echo in recent stages of the pilgrimage of trust and in the life of the Church.

The inner double page offers a reflection on the theme of mercy as it appears in Scripture and in Christian thought.

KENYA

In situations of conflict, will we find ways of listening to others?

Some Taizé brothers have recently returned to Nairobi:

"Little by little we are making contact again with the city, with the communities and with individuals. We find the same traffic holdups, the *matatus* (minibuses) with their high noise level, the crowds in the city centre, the dust… Bit by bit, people are becoming less tense after the stress of these weeks of turmoil that set several regions ablaze. Everybody has their mind on the outcome of the negotiations; some are taking part in emergency aid efforts to help the displaced or in restoring an atmosphere of peace… This is a key moment for the country because through this trial can come a clearer awareness of each person's responsibility for peace and justice in society. The Churches are present in all this and help people to reflect on what the country has come through. Much remains to be done, for many often take positions on the basis of speeches heavily marked by propaganda. So the different points of view are still far apart. In the neighbourhoods, however, as you listen to people, many tell stories of solidarity between people of different tribes and give testimonies of mutual assistance…"

ITALY

Let us dare to revise our lifestyle in the direction of greater simplicity.

Maurizio is a professor of urban studies at the University of Brescia, Italy. Last summer, with his wife Erminia and their four children, he spent a month in Taizé to help with the welcome of families. He was also present at the meeting in Geneva. He has placed his university studies at the service of the reflection begun last year on sustainable development. In the workshop on this topic each week in Taizé, he has tried to show first of all that a responsible management of the resources of our societies requires an interaction between economic, social and environmental development, with each of these spheres necessarily limited by the two others. Because of this, the word "development" cannot systematically refer to the myth of constant growth of our societies. To the extent that our life together is a network of interlocking limits, beginning

Continued on last page

LISTENING TO THE WORD

A Mother's Love

> Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones. But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. Your builders outdo your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go away from you. (Isaiah 49:13-17)

To all appearances, God has forgotten his people. At this point in history they are in exile in Babylon—depressed, homesick, alienated. Zion, their home city far away, is empty and in ruins.

This historical experience of God's people at a given date can shed light on experiences of the same kind that can happen to any group or individual. We find ourselves in a situation where it is not good to be. Everything seems meaningless; God seems to be no longer with us. Our prayer, if we still pray at all, becomes a complaint: "God has forgotten me."

Through the prophet's words, God replies to this complaint with great force and infinite gentleness. To suppose that God forgets us is to be utterly, completely mistaken. God compares himself with a mother (the Bible's images of God are not exclusively masculine) whose attentive concern for her child never fails: and God's attention is more constant even than this. In another image, God has "inscribed" his people's name not on some external memorial, but on the palms of his own hands, from which he can never be separated. The ruined state of the city's walls does not mean that God is absent or that he will have no more to do with them: no, they are always in his presence, and they are going to be rebuilt and come alive again.

The prophet's announcement of God's attentive love already transforms the situation, even before the physical return from exile. It is good news, and the joy of it already begins to overflow from God's people to the mountains, the earth, to the whole universe.

What experiences have I known, individually or as a member of a group, of seeming to be forgotten by God?

In such situations, what can I do to express to God that I would like to welcome his attentive love, even if as yet I hardly perceive it?

What can I do to help others who may feel alienated or "in exile" to become aware of this love that transforms?

A BIBLICAL WORD

Mercy

"Happy the merciful, for they will receive m
cy" (Matthew 5:7). Jesus promises nothing e
to the merciful than what they are already l
ing—mercy. In the other beatitudes, the prom
contains something more, leads further: th
who weep will be comforted; the pure of he
will see God. But what more could God give
the merciful? Mercy is the fullness of God a
of human beings. The merciful are already l
ing God's own life.

"Mercy" is an old word. In the course of its lo
history it has acquired a very rich meaning.
Greek, the language of the New Testament,
word for mercy is *eleos*. This word is familiar to
from the prayer *Kyrie eleison*, which is a call for
Lord's mercy. *Eleos* is the usual translation in
Greek version of the New Testament for the H
brew word *hesed*. *Hesed* is one of the most beauti
words in the Bible. It is often translated simply
love.

Hesed, mercy or love, is part of the vocabul
of the covenant. On God's side, it stands for
steadfast love, one able to keep alive a relationsl
forever, regardless of what happens: "My love w
never depart from you" (Isaiah 54:10). But sin
God's covenant with his people is a story of brok
promises and new beginnings from the very st
(Exodus 32–34), it is evident that such an unco
ditional love includes forgiveness; it must of nec
sity be merciful.

Eleos also is used to translate another Hebr
word, *rachamim*. This word is often used togeth
with *hesed*, but is more emotionally loaded. I
erally it stands for the bowels; it is a plural fo
of *rechem*, a mother's womb. Mercy or comp
sion is here a love which is felt, the deep aff
tion of a mother for her little child (Isaiah 49:1
the tenderness of a father for his offspring (Psa
103:13), an intense love between brothers and
ters (Genesis 43:30).

MAY
DAILY READINGS

1 Mt 28:16-20
Thu ASCENSION
Jesus, risen from the dead, appeared to his disciples and said: Go, make disciples of all nations. And surely I am with you always, to the end of time.

2 Heb 9:24-28
Fri Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, but into heaven itself, in order to stand for us in God's presence.

3 Ps 56
Sat You have delivered my soul from death, Lord, so that I may walk in the presence of God in the light of life.

4 Jn 17:6-11
SUN Jesus prayed to his Father for his disciples, saying: I am no longer in the world; they are in the world and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so that they may be one as we are one.

5 1 Co 2:12-16
Mon We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that comes from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.

6 Ps 42
Tue In the day, the Lord sends his faithful love, and even at night the song it inspires in me is a prayer to the God of my life.

7 Hos 14:2-9
Wed The Lord says: I will cure my people of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart. I hear them and watch over them.

8 Is 40:6-8
Thu Isaiah said: Grass withers and flowers fade, but the word of our God will stand forever.

9 Mk 9:30-37
Fri Jesus said to his disciples: If anyone wants to be first, they must make themselves last of all and servant of all.

10 Jn 15:1-5
Sat Jesus said: Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

11 Rm 5:1-11
SUN PENTECOST
Our hope will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

12 1 Th 1:1-5
Mon Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: Our gospel came to you not only in words, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with great effect.

13 Jn 14:15-26
Tue Before his Passion, Jesus said to his disciples: I shall ask the Father and he will give you another protector, the Holy Spirit, to be with you for ever.

14 Mt 7:7-11
Wed Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.

15 2 Co 3:4-6
Thu God has made us able to serve a new covenant, one which is not of written letters but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

16 Ps 23
Fri You guide me, Lord, on paths of righteousness. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

17 Ps 62
Sat Rest in God alone, my soul! God is the source of my hope.

18 Jn 3:14-21
SUN God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through him. No one who believes in him will be judged.

19 Is 43:18-21
Mon The Lord says: Look, I am doing something new, even now it is emerging, do you not see it? Yes, I am making a way in the desert and my people will sing my praises.

20 Is 40:1-5
Tue Console my people, says your God, console them and speak to their hearts.

21 Ep 3:1-12
Wed Paul writes: I have become a servant of the Gospel by the gift of God's grace, which is for me to proclaim to the nations the unfathomable riches of Christ.

22 Rm 12:3-8
Thu Just as each of us has one body with many parts, and the parts do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, who are many, form one body, and each of us belongs to all the others.

23 Mk 4:1-9,13-20
Fri Jesus said in a parable: Some, like seeds sown in good soil, listen to the Word of God, accept it, and bear much fruit.

24 Ps 51
Sat O God, you desire truth in the inward being. Create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

25 Jn 6:51-58
SUN Jesus said: Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

26 1 P 1:3-9
Mon Though you have not seen Christ Jesus, you love him. Still without seeing him you believe in him and so are already filled with a joy so glorious it cannot be described.

27 Mk 9:17-29
Tue Someone said to Jesus: I believe! Help my lack of faith.

28 1 Th 5:12-28
Wed May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through, and may your spirit, soul and body be kept blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and will do this.

29 Lk 22:24-27
Thu Jesus said to his disciples: Who is the greater: the one at table or the one who serves? The one at table, surely? Yet I am among you as one who serves.

30 Rv 3:7-8
Fri Thus says the Lord: Though you are not very strong, you have kept my word, and now I have opened before you a door that no one can close.

31 Jn 3:14-21
Sat Jesus said: Whoever acts according to the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they are doing is done in God.

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God of all loving, for each of us you wish a Gospel joy. And when we experience trials, a way forward remains open, that of abandoning ourselves in you.

JUNE

DAILY READINGS

1 Mt 7:24-27
SUN Jesus said: Whoever listens to my words and puts them into practice is like someone who built their house on rock.

2 Is 58:7-10
Mon If you do away with the accusing finger and malicious talk, if you give what is yours for the hungry, then your light will rise in the darkness and your darkest hour will be like the middle of the day.

3 Jn 15:9-13
Tue Jesus said: This is my commandment — love one another as I have loved you.

4 Jn 10:11-18
Wed Jesus said: I am the good shepherd. My sheep will listen to my voice and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

5 1 Jn 2:7-10
Thu The darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. Whoever loves their neighbour remains in the light.

6 Heb 5:1-10
Fri Jesus offered up prayer and entreaty to the one who could save him from death; he surrendered himself and was heard.

7 Heb 4:14-16
Sat Jesus is well able to understand our weakness. He was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin.

8 Mt 9:10-13
SUN Jesus said: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Indeed, I have come not to call the just, but sinners.

9 Heb 10:19-25
Mon Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and in fullness of faith. Let us hold to the hope we profess, without wavering, for the one who has promised is faithful.

10 Mt 6:25-34
Tue Jesus said: Do not be anxious about your life... Your Father in heaven knows what you need. Do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself.

11 Dt 7:7-8
Wed Moses told the people: God set his heart on you and chose you, not because you are more numerous than other peoples, but out of love for you.

12 1 Jn 2:24-28
Thu John wrote to the first Christians: Let what you heard in the beginning remain in you. Then you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.

13 Lk 24:35-48
Fri The Risen Christ opened the minds of his disciples to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus is it written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead."

14 Jn 14:1-12
Sat Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

15 Mt 9:36—10:8
SUN Jesus said to his disciples: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest.

16 2 S 22:17-20
Mon The Lord rescued me from enemies who were stronger than I am and set me in the open.

17 Jude 20-21
Tue Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

18 Lk 19:1-10
Wed Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus as he passed. Jesus said to him: "Come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today." And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully.

19 Jn 6:37-40
Thu Jesus said: The will of the one who sent me is that I should lose none of those he has given me, but that I should raise them up on the last day.

20 Ps 119:33-40
Fri Turn my heart towards your way, O God, and not to selfish gain. By your word give me life.

21 1 Jn 2:1-6
Sat John writes: Whoever claims to be in Christ must walk as he did.

22 Mt 10:26-33
SUN Jesus said: Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Father knowing. And even the very hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid.

23 Ps 72
Mon In God's days justice will flourish, and peace in plenty until the end of time. For the Lord rescues the needy who call to him and the poor who have no one to help.

24 Ac 13:23-25
Tue St JOHN THE BAPTIST As John was completing his work, he said: Who do you think I am? I am not that one. No, but one is coming after me, whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

25 Rm 6:12-14
Wed Give yourselves to God and then sin will no longer have any power over you — you are not under law, but under grace.

26 Si 2:1-11
Thu You who revere the Lord, trust in him, await his good gifts: everlasting joy and mercy.

27 Is 45:1-7
Fri God says: I will go before you and will level the mountains so that you may know that I am the Lord, the one who calls you by name.

28 Ac 10:1-35
Sat Peter said: I now really understand that God has no favourites, but that in every nation he loves those who revere him and act justly.

29 Mt 16:13-20
SUN SS PETER AND PAUL Peter said to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, for this was not revealed to you by any human, but by my Father in heaven."

30 1 Jn 1:5-7
Mon If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we are in communion with one another.

Holy Spirit, enable us to turn toward you at every moment. So often we forget that you are dwelling in us, that you are praying in us, that you are loving in us. Your presence in us is trust and constant forgiveness.

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JULY

DAILY READINGS

1 Ps 119:1-16
Tue With all my heart I seek you, O God. I treasure your promises in my heart so as not to sin against you.

2 1 Jn 5:14-15
Wed John writes: We are confident that if we ask God for anything, and it is in accordance with his will, he will hear us.

3 Jn 20:24-29
Thu St THOMAS Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus replied, "You believe because you can see me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

4 2 Co 1:3-7
Fri Blessed be God who consoles us in all our afflictions. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

5 1 Jn 2:3-6
Sat In the person who keeps the word of Christ, God's love is truly made complete.

6 Mt 11:28-30
SUN Jesus said: Come to me, you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest.

7 Is 12:1-6
Mon Sing of the Lord, for his works are great: make them known throughout the world. Cry out for joy, for God is among you.

8 1 P 1:13-21
Tue Through Christ you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory for this very purpose — that your faith and hope should be in God.

9 Jn 9:1-40
Wed Jesus said to the blind man whom he had healed: "Do you believe in the Son of man?" "Sir," the man replied, "tell me who he is, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said: "You have seen him; he is speaking to you."

10 2 P 3:8-18
Thu Relying on God's promise, we are looking towards a new heaven and a new earth where justice will dwell.

11 Jm 5:7-11
Fri James writes: For an example of patience in the face of suffering look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord: those who persevered are blessed.

12 Jn 10:22-30
Sat Jesus said: My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I and the Father are one.

13 Mt 13:1-23
SUN In a parable, Jesus said: The seed which was sown in good soil is like someone who hears the Word and understands it; that person bears fruit.

14 Ep 2:19-22
Mon You are part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.

15 1 Jn 4:7-12
Tue God's love for us has been shown in this way: God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him.

16 Mi 7:18-20
Wed What God can compare with you, Lord, for pardoning sin and overlooking transgression? You will again have compassion on us, treading our sins underfoot.

17 Mt 4:18-22
Thu Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

18 Mk 8:27-35
Fri Jesus taught his disciples: The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously and to be rejected by the chief priests and scribes, to be put to death, and after three days to rise again.

19 Col 3:12-21
Sat Paul writes: May the word of Christ dwell in you in all its fullness.

20 Mt 13:31-33
SUN Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with a large amount of flour until the whole thing rose.

21 Ps 40:7-12
Mon Here I am, I have come and, as it is written, I desire to do your will, my God. Your law is deep within my heart.

22 Jr 3:12
Tue The Lord says: Return to me, for I am merciful.

23 Ac 15:5-12
Wed Peter said: God chose me so that the nations might hear from my lips the message of the Good News and believe. God makes no distinction between human beings.

24 Hos 6:3-4,6
Thu The Lord says: I desire faithful love, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.

25 Mt 20:24-28
Fri St JAMES
Jesus said: The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life for the ransom of many.

26 2 Co 12:1-10
Sat Paul writes: God said to me: My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

27 Mt 13:44-46
SUN Jesus said: The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; they hide it again, and in their joy sell everything they have and buy that field.

28 Ezk 20:40-44
Mon God says to his people: I shall gather you from all the nations where you have been scattered. Through you, I shall display my holiness for all nations to see.

29 Is 61:1-4
Tue The Lord sent me to comfort all who mourn, to clothe them in festive garments instead of despondency.

30 2 Co 1:18-22
Wed Paul writes: Christ Jesus was never Yes-and-No; his nature is all Yes.

31 Mt 10:37-42
Thu Jesus said: If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, they will certainly not lose their reward.

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Risen Christ, by your Holy Spirit you live in us and to each one you say: "Come, follow me, I have opened for you a way of life."

God of compassion, as we listen to your Holy Spirit, we long to remain trusting enough to be able to abandon ourselves to you in every situation.

AUGUST
DAILY READINGS

1 1 P 5:5-7
Fri Clothe yourselves in humility in your relationships with others, for God gives his grace to the humble.

2 Ps 5
Sat Thanks to your faithful love I may enter your house, where I bow down in adoration. Lead me, O Lord, in your justice.

3 Mt 14:13-21
SUN Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, who gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.

4 Mt 12:46-50
Mon Jesus said: Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.

5 Heb 13:7-16
Tue There is no permanent dwelling for us here, but we are looking for the one which is to come.

6 Mt 17:1-8
Wed TRANSFIGURATION On the mountain where Jesus was transfigured, a bright cloud covered the disciples and a voice said: This is my beloved Son on whom my favour rests; listen to him.

7 Jr 33:1-8
Thu The Lord says: Look, I am bringing recovery and healing to my people. I will reveal to them peace and faithfulness in full measure.

8 1 Co 2:1-9
Fri Paul writes: I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you God's mystery, for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

9 Lk 4:42-44
Sat Jesus said: I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, because that is why I was sent.

10 Mt 14:23-33
SUN Jesus went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came he was there, alone.

11 Hos 14:2-9
Mon The Lord says: I will cure my people of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart.

12 Col 3:8-11
Tue You have put on a new self that is being renewed in the image of its Creator. Here there is no room for distinction between persons; there is only Christ, who is all and in all.

13 Lk 17:3-4
Wed Jesus said: If your brother wrongs you seven times in a day and seven times comes back to you and says, "I repent", forgive him.

14 Ps 119:49-56
Thu Your will is a song for me. In the night I remember your name, Lord.

15 Lk 1:39-56
Fri THE VIRGIN MARY Mary said: The Lord's merciful love stretches from age to age upon those who revere him.

16 Rm 11:29,33-36
Sat Paul writes: God never revokes his gifts or his call.

17 Mt 15:21-28
SUN Jesus said to the Canaanite woman: Woman, you have great faith! May your wish be granted.

18 Ps 103
Mon Bless the Lord, my soul; let all that is in me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul; forget none of his good deeds.

19 1 Jn 4:12-21
Tue Let us love, since God loved us first. Anyone who does not love the brother or sister they see cannot love God, whom they do not see.

20 2 Tm 2:22-26
Wed St. Paul writes: A servant of the Lord must not engage in quarrels but should be welcoming to all and patient in adversity.

21 Jr 32:37-41
Thu The Lord says: I shall make an everlasting covenant with my people: never to cease in my efforts for their good.

22 Gn 50:15-21
Fri Joseph forgave his brothers saying: Do not be afraid. The harm you planned to do me has, by God's design, been turned to good, to bring about the survival of a numerous people.

23 Is 45:20-25
Sat There is no other God but me, says the Lord. Turn to me and you will be saved, all you ends of the earth.

24 Mt 16:13-20
SUN Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" "Some say John the Baptist," they answered, "some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But you," he said, "who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

25 1 P 1:22-25
Mon Peter writes: The Word of the Lord remains for ever. And this Word is the Good News that has been brought to you.

26 Mt 9:9-13
Tue As he walked, Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me". And he got up and followed him.

27 Si 17:1-14
Wed God created human beings in his image; he has placed his light in their hearts.

28 2 Co 5:20—6:2
Thu Paul writes: We are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were making his appeal through us. And we implore you in the name of Christ: be reconciled to God. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

29 Mt 10:37-42
Fri Jesus told those he sent out: Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

30 Rm 15:1-6
Sat May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves, so that with one heart and one voice you may glorify God.

31 Mt 16:21-27
SUN Jesus said: Whoever tries to save their life will lose it, but whoever risks their life for my sake will find it.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

rcy in the biblical sense is much more than
y one aspect of God's love. Mercy is in some
God's own being. God speaks his Name
times to Moses. The first time, he says "I am
I am" (Exodus 3:14). The second time: "I am
ous to whom I am gracious, and show mer-
whom I show mercy" (Exodus 33:19). The
m of the phrase is the same, but graciousness
mercy are substituted for being. For God, be-
who he is means being gracious and showing
y. This is confirmed by the third proclama-
of the divine Name: "The Lord, a merciful
gracious God, slow to anger, rich in steadfast
and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6).

his last formula was taken up by the prophets
in the psalms, particularly in Psalm 103, verse
n the central part (verses 11-13), this psalm
vels at the incredible scope of God's mercy: "As
as the heavens are above the earth, so great is
l's mercy...": mercy is thus God's loftiness, his
scendence. But it is also God's humanity, if we
put it that way: "As a father has compassion on
children..." So transcendent and at the same
e so close, it is able to take away all evil: "As far
he East is from the West, so far he removes our
ts from us."

Mercy is what is most divine in God, but also
at is most sublime in human beings. "He
wns you with steadfast love and mercy," says
lm 103. This verse should be read in the light
another verse from Psalm 8 where it is said that
d crowns human beings "with glory and hon-
" Created in the divine image, human beings are
led to share in God's glory and beauty. But it is
adfast love and mercy that enable us to partici-
e truly in God's own life.

Jesus' words: "Be merciful as your Father is
erciful" (Luke 6:36) echo the ancient com-
andment "Be holy as I, the Lord your God, am
ly" (Leviticus 19:2). Jesus imparted the face of
ercy to God's holiness. Mercy is the purest re-
ction of God in a human life. "Through mercy
your neighbor you resemble God" (Saint Basil
e Great). Mercy is God's humanity. It is also the
vine future of human beings.

REFLECTING ON THE WORD

Does forgiving mean forgetting?

There are wounds we do not forget. In certain tragic situations, the road to healing seems to involve becoming more deeply aware of the wrong done rather than forgetting. The evil is not purged—it remains in any case—but rather it is held before one so that little by little it can be immersed in love and then transformed. If the Old Testament speaks of God's anger, that is because God is hurt and his love towards Israel is wounded by the unfaithfulness of his people.

The most extraordinary aspect of Bible history—this is what the prophets discovered—resides in the fact that, out of love, God goes beyond his own anger: "My people are bent on turning away from me. (...) My heart recoils within me, all my inner being boils, but I will not execute my fierce anger, (...) for I am God and no mortal (...)" (Hosea 11:7-9). For the one who forgives, forgiveness is a struggle with one's own anger. The passion we feel does not lead to a violent reaction but to an inner wrenching, to sacrificing one's desire for justice in order to take a step towards the one who sinned.

The prophet Isaiah goes even further, describing a mysterious figure with the features of a suffering servant: "A man of sorrow, acquainted with infirmity (...) despised and held to be of no account. Whereas it was our sufferings he was bearing and our diseases he was carrying. (...) In his wounds we find healing." (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Christians can recognize in this text an anticipation of the life Jesus offered for others. Jesus' patience before his opponents, his passion in Jerusalem, lead us to realize that he did not flee either from suffering or from those who were trying to trap him. Rather than arming himself against attacks, Jesus truly welcomed what presented itself to him with no advance preparation nor afterthought. If he could say on the cross "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34), that is because he went to the extreme point of openness for love's sake and consented to be hurt at the hands of those he loved.

In this sense, the Cross takes on an existential dimension which all of us, even non-believers, are confronted with: we only truly suffer at the hands of those we love. If my enemy makes me suffer, that is normal, but how can I consent to suffer at the hands of my friend (see Psalm 55:12-14)? Every relationship of love leaves a door open to vulnerability, in other words the possibility of being hurt. Remembering this, not running away from this vulnerability, is already a way of preparing ourselves for forgiveness.

with the environment, "development" means seeking a dynamic equilibrium between limitations rather than continuous exponential progress. He has also tried to describe what the adjective "sustainable" implies in managing the rhythm of development (favoring long-term rather than short-term results) and in managing the capacity of nature to absorb (for example by calculating the ecological footprint made by human activities, in other words the surface of the inhabited earth necessary for a given lifestyle). Using this last concept, he suggested that everyone compare the ecological footprint of their life at Taizé and their life at home, and then reflect in small groups on the concrete actions we can undertake in order to take into account in our daily lives the call to simplify our existence.

BRAZIL

Will we be close to those who are poorer than we are?

One of the brothers living in Alagoinhas reacts to the questions in the *Letter from Cochabamba*:

"For me the encounter between different cultures takes place above all in our neighbourhood, by being in touch with families poorly structured because of alcohol, violence (including sexual violence), drugs or premature deaths due to discrimination in health care. Of course every family in our neighbourhood does not suffer from one of these factors, but it seems important to me to mention the children growing up under such conditions.

"Activities with the children, such as 'the school to learn a lot,' the 'Emmaus classes' for children between 10 and 13 years old who have not had any luck in school, religious training in a high-risk area of our neighbourhood, represent for us a 'preferential option' for the poor.

"To give some examples, I have in mind first of all that stepfather of two children, a drug dealer it seems, who was murdered during the children's summer camp; during the next camp, the mother of two teenagers was arrested and put in prison. Several teenagers had to be sent back home… but to what home? One mother disappeared with a new *companheiro*; others drink; some work as prostitutes while their children have no father. It is not a widespread situation, of course, but it asks a question: 'When there is no solution at hand, where can we find the inner energy to continue?'

"In this sense there is a surprising gift in our neighbourhood—the Gospel stories begin to speak by themselves through the reality of daily life. In some homes, the needs often recall situations found in the Gospels and I try to refer to them. When you read the Gospel with a group of mothers, they are the ones who surprise me because they understand much more directly the meaning of what Jesus said."

JAPAN

Will we go to the point of forgiving?

During the visit of one of the brothers to Japan, some thirty young adults met in Tokyo, in the Ikebukuro Anglican Church. They regularly lead meditative prayers with the songs of Taizé in their own congregation or community. This is a great responsibility for them, and they needed to be able to pray once without having to worry that everything was going well.

Sister Mary Gillis wrote, "The experience was a very moving one for me. I will attempt to share with you what has remained in my heart from those days. The flow of the prayer is especially suited to Japan, where the people are very contemplative, and are comfortable with silence and quiet. The repetitive nature of the music is also something which is familiar to the Japanese people because of their Buddhist roots, where prayer is often repetitive and rhythmical. That and the atmosphere created by the candles and music helped the people to let the flow of the prayer take them into the depths of their hearts, where God was waiting for them.

"A large part of the program was devoted to Brother Alois' Letter, which we meditated on individually and shared in the group. The sharing in both Takamatsu and Kochi was very deep. Three words especially run through my mind: forgiveness, simplicity, time.

"There was healing and forgiveness. One young man spoke of his search for the grace to forgive. He has been wounded and he wants to forgive. As I translated for him, I felt that he had perhaps already received that grace, for his eyes were the transparent eyes of a child. Another young man, who took a day off from work to be there, certainly found healing, for in our last prayer session he, too, joined in the singing. One woman, who had suffered incredibly in her life, honestly shared her story with us and spoke of the certainty she has that God loves her and is always with her.

"Several women spoke of their desire to lead a simple life, unencumbered by things. The desire for simplicity in one woman was inspired by her experience of cleaning out her old home after the death of her mother. Another commented on how hard it is for her to discard anything because of her experience of living through World War II, when they didn't have anything.

"Time was an issue for most of the young people present. The words of last year's Letter, 'Giving our time is precious,' seemed to resonate deeply with them. Perhaps it had never occurred to them before that our time is a gift we can give to others."

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